

Minutes, Standing Committee on Rules, December 5, 2005

The meeting was called to order by the Chair at 7:30 PM. Members present were: Teri Banerjee, Joel Winett, Bernice Strom, Archie Lyon, Ed Kross, Michael Berardi and Gloria Geller. There was a motion and second to accept the Minutes of November 7, 2005. The original minutes as submitted to Town Clerk have been amended by adding the two paragraphs shown in italics.

Joel Winett presented an article that he will submit to the Spring Town Meeting. The article concerns itself with reports from various departments, boards, committees and commissions that should get reported to Town Meeting. The reports are initiated by:

1. Reports from departments, boards, commissions and committees.
2. Reports required by MGL or town by-laws.
3. Reports requested by town officials.
4. Resolutions at various Town Meetings that have not been addressed by the Board of Selectmen, Fin Comm, etc.

The topic was tabled at 8:00PM to meet with the invited chairs from other standing committees.

Representatives from the other committees were: Dave Hutchinson (Community Services), Wesley Ritchie (Education), Bob Berman (Planning and Zoning), Audrey Hall (Ways and Means) and Christine Long (Public Works).

Wesley Ritchie stated that the Standing Committee on Education currently consists mostly of new Town Meeting members or are new to Education Standing Committee so there doesn't seem to be any guidance from within, therefore they try to meet monthly or as needed.

Christine Long stated that Public Works Committee set its own policy on meeting schedule. They meet on an as-necessary basis rather than regularly. Typically they have 12 to 14 in attendance including a consistently good representation from the Public Works Department.

Audrey Hall reported that Ways and Means does not meet regularly but when warrant is issued they meet sometimes more than once a week to discuss the relevant articles. They have usually 12 -14 in attendance.

Dave Hutchinson reported that Community Service is effective in accomplishing many projects that are not warrant related. They assign a member as a liaison to a department or a project and see it through to completion. When a warrant article comes up that involves Community Service, they pass it along to the appropriate liaison.

Bob Berman reported that Planning and Zoning tends to push issues that is, sponsors articles rather than just study proposed articles. He reported that their recommendations are not always in agreement with the Planning Board.

Overall there was concern that Town Meeting Members do not in practice have opportunity to sit on the Standing Committee of their choice because others from their precinct have held positions for many years making it difficult for others to have a turn. There was also discussion about the way that advance information gets to the appropriate Standing Committee. The Selectmen's office mails out copies of relevant articles to the chairs of the standing committees only, some felt that vice-chairs should get copies also, while others felt that it was the chair's responsibility to distribute the information. There was a question whether forums like this should take place regularly or not, although everyone thought it was a good idea, no schedule was set.

At the end of the discussion the consensus was the meeting was informative and the following action items were suggested:

1. How do people get on Standing Committees?
2. How often should we have joint meetings?
3. Should there be term limits for standing committee members?
4. Outreach vs action on warrants.
5. Road map for the way for citizens to initiate articles to be made available in the Selectmen's office or Town Clerks office.
6. Moderator appointed committees should meet as well to discuss similar issues.

The importance of ballot votes for the December 7th Town Meeting was discussed as a way to have accountability and check on late evening attendance. The meeting was adjourned at 9:30 PM.

Respectfully submitted,
Gloria Geller